

# Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

## CHAPTER XXIX

Henry Keese  
Llano-Gillespie Counties

**E**ACH time Henry Keese and his young wife, Caroline Siegelbiel Keese, heard glowing reports of the opportunities in Texas their desire to go there grew stronger. They were young, and poor. In Texas they were told that everyone had a chance to acquire a home, to buy land and cattle. But they did not have the money to pay for their passage over.

So they decided that Henry, about 22 or 23 years old, should come over first. And as soon as he could save enough money he would send for his wife and their baby boy. He came on to Fredericksburg almost immediately after landing at Indianola. He considered himself fortunate when he was employed almost immediately to care for the cattle at Fort McMillan at Fredericksburg. He saved every penny possible. And he was learning how to handle cattle in the new country, and how to fight the Indians.

When Henry got lonesome and homesick to see his wife and baby, he worked all the harder. And in two years—1856—he had saved enough money to send for them and his brother-in-law, August Siegelbiel. It would have required many years to have earned that much money in Germany. Now he was overjoyed at the prospect of having his loved ones with him again.

While Henry Keese had been working to pay her passage over, Caroline Keese had been working equally as hard to be ready when he sent for her. Her big wooden chests were filled with a sufficient quantity of clothing and household linen to last a long while. Prince Solms had advised all immigrants to bring all the supplies possible with them. The reports from friends already over here substantiated that advice. Her son, just a

baby when his father left, was now a sturdy lad about three years old.

So Caroline Keese, her son and brother, August Siegelbiel, bade good-bye to their loved ones, and started across the great Atlantic in a sailboat. During the voyage the mast broke. A temporary one was used but it slowed them down and they were much longer enroute than had been expected. Rations were cut in half. But finally they landed at Galveston where they transferred to a smaller boat, and came on to Indianola. They rushed out of Indianola as quickly as possible because of the cholera epidemic, and came on to Fredericksburg with the ox freighters.

They went almost immediately to the one-room log cabin Henry had built for them on the head of Sandy Creek near the present boundary of Gillespie and Llano counties. Henry Keese, Ludwig Spaeth, and August Siegelbiel each bought 320 acres of land. August lived with the Henry Keese's, and Ludwig Spaeth's home was about three hundred yards away.

At last they were together again in their own house and on their own land. The cabin as seen through their eyes was luxuriously furnished. There were homemade bedsteads with shuck mattresses under the soft feather beds. No matter how tired they were at night, there was a feeling of comfort when they sank into the depths of the feather bed that seemed to envelope them with a sense of luxury. Some day they would own cattle, but first some of the land had to be cleared, wheat and corn planted and a garden started.

There was plenty of deer and wild turkey. Henry Keese raised hogs, butchered them and sold smoked pork to the soldiers at the fort. During one of his trips to the fort to deliver pork he received an offer to go to Fort Griffin on the Clear Fork of the Brazos to supervise the harvesting of the hay, and to deliver it to Fort Worth. Practically the only money he had made was by freighting, so he considered this an unusually good opportunity. August Siegelbiel would take care of his family.

Mrs. Keese was of a calm disposition and took things as they came. She en-

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dured the loneliness and privation with a constancy as changeless as the solitude about her. It never occurred to her that her husband should not accept the offer to go to Fort Griffin. In fact, she was as grateful as he for an opportunity to earn a little money. So she went about her daily tasks of cooking on the open fireplace, washing, ironing, spinning, and knitting. Later, when August married and moved into his log cabin nearby, she stayed at home alone with her children when her husband had to be away. In his absence she assumed the responsibility of directing the farm activities. She worked in the field if needed. And always she kept the children in sight for fear that an Indian might be lurking near.

The children thought their best time came after the milking and feeding was done, the supper dishes washed and put away. Then they could sit around their mother and listen to the stories of her childhood in Germany; of what hard times they had; how she and their father wanted so badly to come to Texas; how they finally decided for him to come on and leave her and little Henry until he could make enough money to send for them; how for weeks she was on the great big ocean and couldn't see anything except water; of how little they had to eat on account of the long voyage; and how happy they were when they finally got to Fredericksburg and with her husband again.

Because of the constant danger of the Indians Henry Keese became an Indian fighter. They did not come around when he was at home, but when he was away they would steal horses.

One day Mrs. Keese was at home with her five children when she saw some In-



Left—Reunion of the Henry Keese family in 1914. Mr. Keese (with beard) is at the nearest corner of the porch. Right—This picture was taken in the summer of 1904. Standing are Mina (Mrs. H. C. Grote), Lina (Mrs. J. Kneese, deceased), Adolph, Will (deceased), Ida (Mrs. C. Schlaudt), Anna (Mrs. Aug. Grote). Seated—Herman, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Keese, and August.

dians scattering over the field, their usual method of approach when stealing horses in the daytime. One was riding a big white horse which he had stolen from Henry Keese. He was following Ludwig Spaeth as he plowed with two yoke of oxen.

"Shoot that Indian," Mrs. Keese said to her brother, August.

"No, I must save my ammunition," he replied. "They might come to the house."

Evidently Ludwig Spaeth did not know the Indian was near, because he hid in a thicket and waited for Ludwig to turn at the end of the row. As he did so the Indian fired. Mr. Spaeth's twelve-year-old son was also plowing and carrying a pistol. He saved his life by dashing into the high corn and running three hundred

yards to the house, firing as he ran.

Mrs. Spaeth and her children moved away after the death of her husband, so the two families—Henry Keese and August Siegel were left. However, other families began to move it.

Just about the time they got things going the Civil War broke out. Mr. Keese did not enter the army but hauled supplies to the soldiers located at several forts.

While Henry Keese was busy working at home or away from home Mrs. Keese was equally as busy caring for the children and doing the work. She usually did the washing at the old spring which saved carrying water. The garden had to be worked. Cabbages were "krauted down" in big stone jars to be used during

the winter months. She made fine wine of wild grapes. The children thought she made the best vegetable soup. Green beans cooked with vinegar or wine and egg noodles were favorite dishes with Mr. Keese and the children.

Geese had to be cared for and "picked." The feathers were used in making feather beds and big feather pillows. Wool had to be scoured, spun and woven into cloth. Socks and stockings were knitted by Mrs. Keese and the girls.

All the garments were made by hand. The girls were taught to sew as soon as they were large enough. As they grew older they liked lots of ruffles on their dresses. These ruffles were ironed on an old fashion "fluter."

The boys, too, were taught to work. Henry, the oldest son, began driving a freight wagon to Fort Griffin when he was fourteen years of age.

Meantime, Mr. Keese was doing any kind of work he could find. With the exception of money received from the sale of produce he delivered to the fort, he usually accepted goods as pay. He received a cord of wood for splitting rails on the Llano for Julius Lemberg. An initial start in the cattle business was acquired by taking care of cattle for a neighbor and taking pay in Longhorns. He later bought some Red Durhams, and finally some registered Herefords from Fritz Kothmann. Henry Keese loved his land, but his improved cattle were his pride and joy. While he did not go "up the trail" his son, August, did.

August was nineteen years old when he made that trip. He had never ridden on the train! August started in March and returned in July. His horse was to be furnished him, and he was to receive \$35 and his expenses, including the train ticket from Fort Dodge, Kansas, back to Austin!

On a cold day in early March August started from Henry Keese's place. When he reached Charlie Lemberg's place in Castell, the boss of the herd, the cattle numbered 3,000. There were eight men on the drive, including the cook.

The first night out they felt they were fortunate in being able to "hold" the cattle against a fence. There would be less danger of stampede. The cook placed his bed between the wagon and the fence. During the night he was awakened by thunder, he thought. When he opened his eyes he "could see nothing but the legs of the cattle" as they jumped over him. The next night the cook placed his bed under the wagon.

They followed the Western Trail going by Fort Griffin, and crossing the Clear Fork there. The country was covered with myriads of wild flowers—all hues and colors. After crossing Red River the grass was fine. They expected the cattle to gain.

"We moved slowly through Indian Territory in order to give the cattle time to graze," related August Keese.

Indians would come into camp when they wanted to. Since they owned the grass and the cattle were feeding on it they could not be denied that privilege. Sometimes they would want a cow, usually "a big one" or "two little ones." One day the chief wanted a steer but his squaw wanted a cow that August Keese owned. They compromised and took "two little ones" (two calves). Another time the Indians brought a big coffee can and wanted molasses in it. They said they wanted to go to another camp and would pick it up later. In a few days they

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appeared again and got the can of molasses.

The drive encountered heavy rains and during several stormy nights the cattle stampeded. But they did not lose any of the cattle.

One night when August Keese was on guard close to a creek the cattle stampeded. He tried to get them to circle but fell off a bluff into the creek and began sinking in the quicksand. After the cattle were quieted the cowboys pulled him out. He was not hurt, but his lantern was broken. They had to leave the horse there until daylight.

Slowly they moved northward. When they got to the Cimmaron they found the plum trees loaded with plums. Any kind of fruit tasted good and a plum feast was enjoyed.

August Keese was alone when he crossed the Arkansas River. Reaching a little island he was surprised to find a toll gate, and he had no money.

"Go back," the caretaker ordered.

"I'll bring you the money in the morning," replied August Keese, and went on.

Major Smith, the man in Fort Dodge who bought the cattle let him have the money, and he paid his toll the next morning as he had promised.

After the cattle were delivered August took the train back to Austin. He came from there on home in a freight wagon and drove most of the way himself. It had been cold when he left Castell. It was cold when he reached Fort Dodge, Kansas. When he returned home the warmth of the July sun felt good. But the joyful welcome he received from his family upon his return from his first long trip away from home was what warmed his heart.

The Keese's loved their home, and it is still owned by the family. They worked hard but they had good times together. In 1872 they had built a big rock house with thick walls. It contained four rooms downstairs and two upstairs. The kitchen had a flagstone floor. Eight children had been born in the log house. In the new home there was room to work and room to play.

Hein Kuenemen made the walnut furniture—bedsteads, wardrobes, and dressers. Mrs. Keese and the girls did beautiful hand work. Now there was a place to use it.

They seemed to have more time after supper to talk. Mr. and Mrs. Keese told the children stories about their early life in Germany, and about some of their early struggles that the children were too young to remember. And there were humorous stories, too. Mr. Keese had a sense of humor which helped him in many tense situations. One day he rode a big gray horse over on the Llano to see Julius Lemberg, the man for whom he cut wood. It was a beautiful horse, but fiery.

"I want that horse," Mr. Lemberg told him.

"No, you don't want him," answered Henry Keese. "He kicks."

"Oh, yes I do," vowed Mr. Lemberg as he rubbed him confidently with his hands. Just then the horse gave a big kick which knocked the breath out of Mr. Lemberg.

Henry Keese knew he was not seriously hurt. His loud laughter brought Mrs. Lemberg out to see what it was all about. "He is dead," she screamed, "and that boy is still laughing."

The older children went to school in Fredericksburg. After a school was established at Crab Apple nearby the younger children attended there.

Religion to the Keese family was something real, a steadying every-day influence. Perhaps that was the reason that Mrs. Keese could meet each difficulty with a calm serenity; why Mr. Keese could pierce the gloom with a humorous twinkle. Family prayers, from which each member derived spiritual nourishment, were as much a part of the daily routine as eating three square meals a day for the nourishment of the physical body. In the early days they usually got to attend church services at Fredericksburg about every three months. Frequently they had prayer meeting in their home on Wednesday evening.

When they moved into the big house Saturday was perhaps the busiest day of the week for Mrs. Keese and the girls.

Every floor was scrubbed until it was spotless. They were getting ready for lots of company the following day after church services. They baked bread, cakes and pies. The bread was kneaded in an old earthen crock which Mrs. August Keese is still using. They boiled ham or baked hens, and during the hunting season Mr. Keese and the boys killed wild turkey and deer. All the work possible was done on Saturday. Vegetables, fruits and other perishable food, however, had to be prepared on Sunday morning before the crowd came. It was hard work, but was done cheerfully.

After church services were over, the real visiting started. The neighbor women and girls helped serve, washed dishes and put them away. The women col-

## Thank You

To the following, all of whom made purchases in my Hereford sale at San Angelo on April 9, I extend thanks for their support and wish them success with the cattle they obtained:

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**PUSSY FOOT**

Yearling stud, mane and tail grey and silver, dark yellow gold body, blaze face and white left hind leg (\$1,000).

Outside of these we have only one other stud colt, a blazed faced sorrell, double Old Joe, yearling. Price \$300. Good.

**JACK CASEMENT, Whitewater, Colorado**

lected in groups, watched the children, exchanged recipes and news. The men talked "cattle and crops." Many courtships started among the boys and girls whose engagements were shyly whispered later.

Christmas was a gala occasion, even though there was very little money to spend. The cookies which Mrs. Keese cut in fancy shapes and decorated with caraway seeds were a real treat to the children. The beautiful cedar Christmas tree was decorated with bright colored paper to which Santa Claus (sometimes a neighbor covered with a sheet) brought red apples. This was something for the children to think about through the childish eternity from one Christmas to the next.

Henry Keese and his wife were glad they had come to America. They were better off. Their children had better opportunities. Their first great loss occurred when Henry passed away. He had been his mother's greatest comfort during those two lonely years she remained in Germany until her husband could send for her. The three had been so happy when they moved into their little cabin on Sandy. When his father was away Henry had assumed all the responsibility he could to save his mother. He took a severe cold after swimming in the river one cold day. He developed tuberculosis and died when he was only eighteen years old.

The Keese family did not have a great deal of sickness. When any of the children were ailing Mrs. Keese "doctored" them herself. But one time when one of them had been quite ill for several days she sent to Fredericksburg for their doctor and beloved friends, Dr. William Keidel. He decided the child had appendicitis and told him not to eat anything for a few days.

"But he has not eaten anything for eight or nine days already," exclaimed Mrs. Keese.

"Oh, he can wait another day or two," smiled Dr. Keidel, "for he must not eat anything now."

Because Mr. Keese had to be away from home so much of the time, Mrs. Keese assumed more responsibility for the children. Mr. Keese always supported her in her decisions with regard to them.

Mr. Keese was interested in improving his livestock. He realized that the time would come when the land would be under fence, that there would be no more free grazing. He accumulated all the acreage he could afford. At the time of his death he owned 4,000 acres.

Mr. Keese had a large number of cattle and sheep. After a slump in the cattle market he raised some cotton. He received good prices for it, but he was always more interested in raising cattle.

The Keese children, too, loved the land. Hermann, August and Will married daughters of nearby ranchmen. Minnie, Annie, Ida and Lina married successful ranchmen. Adolph was still at home with his parents.

While Mr. and Mrs. Keese missed the children at home, they looked forward to their regular visits on Sundays. The grandchildren thought their grandmother made the best cookies, and looked forward to eating them with as much pleasure as her own children used to look forward to the cookies she made for them at Christmas time.

Mr. and Mrs. Keese passed away within a few years of each other. To the last they were interested in the community

and the new country of which they had become naturalized citizens; where they had helped to blaze the way for the civilization enjoyed by their children and grandchildren today. Their basic factors—honest and sincerity of purpose—are reflected in the lives of their descendants today, while they lie at rest in the family grave yard.

The Keese children are: Hermann, married Erna Ellebright; Minnie, married Henry Grote; August, married Mina Schmidt; Will, married Emelia Grote; Annie, married August Grote; Adolph, unmarried; Ida, married Charlie Schlaudt, and Lina, married John Kneese.

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